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men Workers: A Statistical Overview

U.S. Department of Labor
Employment Standards Administration
Women's Bureau
1977 (Revised)

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Minority Women Workers: A Statistical Overview

U.S. Department of Labor
Ray Marshall, Secretary

Employment Standards Administration
Donald Elisburg,
Assistant Secretary for Employment Standards

Women's Bureau
Alexis M. Herman, Director
1977 (Revised)

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The 1974-76 period proved to be a particularly difficult time for many workers--minority and white alike. Unemployment rose throughout 1974, and the 1975 jobless rates, on an annual average basis, were the highest since data became available by race in 1948. Although overall unemployment fell somewhat in 1976, unemployment rates were higher than at any time in the post-World War II era.

In 1976 women had an unemployment rate of 8.6 percent, compared with 7.0 percent for men. The rate for all minority workers was 13.1 percent, substantially higher than the 7.0 percent for whites. Minority women, then, experiencing both sex and race discrimination, face a double disadvantage in their job search. The jobless rate of these women in 1976 was 13.6 percent.

Despite the higher unemployment rates of minority women workers, other disadvantages which these women have faced (although still severe) have been alleviated to some extent, particularly since 1960. First, the occupational distribution of minority women has become more favorable as women have moved into more skilled and professional jobs from the more menial service-type occupations. Second, this occupational shift has been a significant factor in raising the median wage or salary income of minority women; it rose from $2,372 in 1960 to $6,611 in 1974 for those working full time throughout the year. This was an increase of 179 percent over the 14-year period. The income of white women showed a less spectacular increase of 106 percent--from $3,410 to $7,025.

Labor Force Participation

The labor force participation rate of minority women has remained steady in recent years, while the rate of white women, although still below that of minorities, has risen considerably. In 1976 there were 5.0 million minority women 16 years of age and over in the civilian labor force. Minority women accounted for 12 percent of all women in the population and for 13 percent of all women workers. Among all minority women, about 50 percent were workers, as compared with 47 percent of the white women (table 1). The labor force participation rate of minority women was highest among those 25 to 34 years of age; the rate of white women was highest in the 20- to 24-year-age group.

The proportion of minority women in the labor force exceeded that of white women in all age groups 25 years and over. The difference was greatest among women 25 to 34 years of age, where 65 percent of minority women were workers compared with 56 percent of white women. The situation was reversed, however, among women 16 to 24 years of age.

Note: Minority races are comprised of all races other than white, including Negro, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Hawaiian, Eskimo, Aleut, and all other nonwhite races. Negroes constitute 89 percent of persons of minority races. Persons of Spanish origin are included in the white population.

Table 1.--Percentage of Persons in the Civilian Labor Force, by Age, Sex, and Race, 1976

Age	Women		Men	
	Minority	White	Minority	White
Total, 16 years and over	50.2	46.9	70.7	78.4
16 and 17 years	23.9	43.8	30.2	51.8
18 and 19 years	43.3	61.8	55.6	73.5
20 to 24 years	57.9	66.2	78.4	86.2
25 to 34 years	65.3	55.8	90.6	95.9
35 to 44 years	62.2	57.1	90.6	96.0
45 to 54 years	57.3	54.7	83.4	92.5
55 to 64 years	43.4	40.8	65.7	75.4
65 years and over	11.2	8.0	19.7	20.3
18 to 64 years	57.7	55.2	81.1	89.1

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment and Earnings, January 1977.

Unemployment Status

In 1976 the unemployment rate of adult minority women (20 years and over) averaged 11.3 percent, about the same as the 11.5-percent rate in 1975 (table 2). The rate for white adult women was 6.8 percent, down from 7.5 percent registered the previous year.

Although relatively small in number, teenagers continued to be the most seriously affected group, with a jobless rate of 39.0 percent for minority young women 16 to 19 years (35.4 percent for minority young men) and 16.4 percent for white young women (17.3 percent for white young men).

Table 2.--Unemployment Rates, by Race, Age, and Sex, 1975 and 1976

Age	Women		Men	
	1976	1975	1976	1975
Minority				
Total, 16 years and over	13.6	14.0	12.7	13.7
16 to 19 years	39.0	38.5	35.4	35.4
20 years and over	11.3	11.5	10.6	11.7
White				
Total, 16 years and over	7.9	8.6	6.4	7.2
16 to 19 years	16.4	17.4	17.3	18.3
20 years and over	6.8	7.5	5.4	6.2

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment and Earnings, January 1977 and January 1976.

In addition to those persons unable to find work (unemployed), there are those who, although employed, cannot find full-time jobs. These workers are classified by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as "involuntary part-time workers" and are considered by many analysts as constituting a form of "disguised unemployment." Although included among the employed count, these persons want full-time jobs but are able to work only part time because of so-called "economic" reasons--slack work, material shortages, and the like. In 1976 one-third (311,000) of minority women and nearly one-fifth (1,379,000) of white women working on part-time schedules were doing so involuntarily.

Another form of disguised unemployment is made up of persons classified as "discouraged workers"--those who desire work but either do not enter the labor force or withdraw from it because they think they cannot find a job. In 1976, 138,000 minority and 451,000 white women were not in the labor force because they were discouraged with job prospects.

Reasons for Unemployment

Adult minority and white women showed slightly different patterns in reasons for joblessness (table 3). Forty percent of minority and 45 percent of white women had lost their jobs. Thirteen and 18 percent, respectively, had voluntarily left their jobs in search of another. Forty percent of minority women and 34 percent of white women were reentrants to the labor force, and 9 percent of minority and 4 percent of white women were new entrants.

The percentage of unemployment accounted for by reentrants to the labor force was more than twice as large among adult women as among adult men in both racial groups. Women made up almost half of the unemployed who were reentrants in 1976. Several factors account for this: (1) most reentrants are women who return to the work force after a period of absence devoted to childrearing, (2) divorce and separation also force many women to reenter the labor market, (3) the continued expansion of the service-producing industries--many offering part-time employment--has led to more jobs for women, and (4) many women have been encouraged to return to the labor force because of the increasing opportunities that have resulted from the breaking down of discriminatory barriers.

Table 3.--Percentage Distribution of Unemployed Persons, by Sex, Age, Race, and Reason for Unemployment, 1976

Sex, age, and race	Total		Job losers	Job leavers	Reentrants	New entrants
	Number (in thousands)	Percent				
Total	7,288	100.0	49.8	12.2	26.0	12.1
Women, 20 years and over	2,546	100.0	43.5	16.5	35.2	4.8
Men, 20 years and over	3,041	100.0	70.1	10.4	16.8	2.7
Both sexes, 16 to 19 years	1,701	100.0	22.6	8.9	28.8	39.7
Minority	1,433	100.0	45.6	9.1	29.8	15.6
Women, 20 years and over	521	100.0	39.7	12.5	39.3	8.6
Men, 20 years and over	567	100.0	67.5	7.9	19.4	5.1
Both sexes, 16 to 19 years	345	100.0	18.6	5.8	32.5	43.1
White	5,855	100.0	50.8	12.9	25.1	11.3
Women, 20 years and over	2,024	100.0	44.5	17.5	34.1	3.9
Men, 20 years and over	2,474	100.0	70.8	10.9	16.1	2.2
Both sexes, 16 to 19 years	1,356	100.0	23.6	9.7	27.9	38.8

Note: Individual items may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

Unemployment During the Recession

To measure the disproportionate burden of unemployment experienced by minority women, it is helpful to present the rise in unemployment of both groups in relative terms rather than to simply compare the jobless rates of both minority and white workers. The "incremental ratio" is such a measure, as it takes the absolute change in unemployment rates and expresses this change in relative terms.1/ Over the course of the recent recession,2/ 11 minority adult women entered the unemployment stream for every 10 white adult women (table 4). Similarly, 18 minority

Table 4.--Peak-to-Trough Change in Unemployment Rates, by Race, Sex, and Age, November 1973 to May 1975

Race, sex, and age	Peak Nov. 1973	Trough May 1975	Over-the-period change
Minority women, 20 years and over	8.1	11.9	3.8
White women, 20 years and over	4.3	7.9	3.6
Incremental ratio			1.1
Minority women, 20 years and over	8.1	11.9	3.8
Minority men, 20 years and over	5.5	11.8	6.3
Incremental ratio			.6
Minority women, 16 to 19 years	31.4	37.9	6.5
White women, 16 to 19 years	13.4	17.0	3.6
Incremental ratio			1.8

Note: Data are seasonally adjusted. The cycle turning points are those defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). Three-month averages were computed to smooth inherent sampling variability (particularly among relatively small sample size groups) from the Current Population Survey and to mitigate somewhat the discrepancy which may occur between the NBER cycle turning points and the turning points in unemployment.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

1/ See Curtis L. Gilroy, "Black and White Unemployment: The Dynamics of the Differential," Monthly Labor Review, February 1974, pp. 38-47, for a more elaborate description of this measure.

2/ For the purpose of this analysis, November 1973 and May 1975 (the low and high points in overall unemployment) have been chosen as the peak and trough months of the recessionary period.

teenage women became unemployed for every 10 white teenage women. Among adult women and men of minority races, however, the situation was reversed. Although the absolute unemployment rates of minority women were higher than those of minority men, 6 minority adult women became unemployed for every 10 minority adult men in the period. This occurred because the percentage increase in the unemployment rate for minority men exceeded that for minority women.

Occupations

Minority women workers were more heavily concentrated in service occupations (including private household) than were white women--35 and 19 percent, respectively, in 1976 (table 5). In contrast, a larger proportion of white women were in professional, technical, or managerial occupations as well as clerical jobs than were minority women--58 percent compared with 43 percent.

Significant changes have occurred in the occupational distribution of women since 1960. Among minority women, the changes have been more dynamic. Between 1960 and 1976 the proportion of minority women who were professional and technical workers rose from 7 percent to over 14 percent; the proportion who were clerical workers increased from 9 to 26 percent. On the other hand, the percentage of private household workers dropped sharply--from 35 to 9 percent.

Table 5.--Major Occupation Groups of Employed Women, by Race, 1960 and 1976 1/

Major occupation group	1976		1960	
	Minority	White	Minority	White
Number (in thousands)	4,356	30,739	2,821	19,376
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Professional and technical workers	14.2	16.2	6.9	13.1
Nonfarm managers and administrators	2.8	5.9	1.8	5.4
Clerical workers	26.0	36.2	9.3	32.9
Sales workers	2.5	7.3	1.5	8.5
Operatives (including transport)	15.7	11.3	14.1	15.1
Service workers (except private household)	26.0	16.8	21.4	13.7
Private household workers	9.4	2.2	35.1	6.1
Other occupations	3.4	4.1	10.8	5.2

1/ Data are for women 16 years of age and over in 1976 but 14 years and over in 1960.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment and Earnings, January 1977 and January 1961.

Marital Status

Forty-five percent of the minority women workers in March 1976 were married and living with their husbands (table 6). Twenty-eight percent were widowed, divorced, or separated from their husbands, and the remaining 27 percent were single. In contrast, among white women workers nearly three-fifths (59 percent) were married and living with their husbands, 24 percent were single, and 18 percent were widowed, divorced, or separated.

Minority women with husbands present were more likely to be in the labor force than were single minority women or those who were widowed, divorced, or separated. Among white women, those with husbands present were less likely to be in the labor force than were single women, but somewhat more likely than those who were widowed, divorced, or separated.

Table 6.--Marital Status of Women in the Labor Force, by Race, March 1976

Marital status	Number (in thousands)	Percent distribution	As percent of women in population
	Minority		
Total	5,018	100.0	50.3
Never married	1,329	26.5	48.5
Married (husband present)	2,268	45.2	54.9
Widowed, divorced, or separated	1,421	28.3	45.7
	White		
Total	32,799	100.0	46.3
Never married	7,754	23.6	61.2
Married (husband present)	19,285	58.8	44.1
Widowed, divorced, or separated	5,760	17.6	39.8

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

Women Heads of Families

In March 1976 there were 2.1 million families headed by women of minority races. They accounted for 28 percent of the 7.5 million families headed by women. Women headed 34 percent of all minority families; by contrast, only 11 percent of all white families had a female head.

Minority families headed by women were almost twice as likely to have incomes below the low-income or poverty level as similar white families--49 percent and 26 percent, respectively, in 1975 (table 7). Among families headed by women who worked full time the year round, the incidence of poverty was almost four times greater for minority families than for white families--15 and 4 percent, respectively.

Table 7.--Work Experience in 1975 of Women Heads of Families With Incomes Below the Low-Income Level, by Race

Race	Total	No work experience	Worked during year	Worked year round full time
	Number of poor families headed by women (in thousands)			
Total	2,430	1,543	887	135
Minority	1,036	667	369	60
White	1,394	876	518	75
	As percent of all families headed by women			
Total	32.5	49.5	20.3	5.8
Minority	49.3	71.4	36.8	15.0
White	25.9	40.4	16.1	4.2

Note: The low-income or poverty level is based on the Social Security Administration's poverty thresholds, adjusted annually in accordance with changes in the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index. Classified as poor in 1975 were those nonfarm households where total money income was less than $2,724 for an unrelated individual; $3,506 for a couple, and $5,500 for a family of four. (The poverty level for farm families is set at 85 percent of the corresponding level for nonfarm families.)

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 103.

For those families headed by women who had no work experience during the year, 71 percent of minority families and 40 percent of white families had incomes below the low-income level.

Working Mothers

Minority mothers, like their white counterparts, have sharply increased their labor force participation in recent years. The greatest increase for both minority and white mothers has been among women with children under 6 years of age. In fact, the participation rate of these minority mothers exceeds the rate for all minority women workers. Although the participation rates for minority mothers have always been considerably higher than those for white mothers, their increase in the last 5 years has not been so marked as that of their white counterparts.

Minority mothers in the labor force in March 1976 totaled 2.2 million, or 15 percent of all working mothers. Sixty-two percent of minority women with children 6 to 17 years of age were workers, as were more than half (53 percent) of those with children under 6 (table 8). The comparable figures for white women were 55 and 38 percent, respectively.

Table 8.--Percentage of Mothers in the Labor Force, by Race, Age of Children, and Marital Status of Mother, March 1976

Age of children	All ever married	Married (husband present)	Other marital status 1/
	Minority		
Total	58.1	58.3	57.7
6 to 17 years	62.4	63.8	60.3
Under 6 years	53.3	53.2	53.8
	White		
Total	47.5	44.8	66.0
6 to 17 years	55.4	52.7	70.9
Under 6 years	37.7	35.5	57.2

1/ Widowed, divorced, or separated.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

Among minority mothers, labor force participation rates were similar for those who were married with husbands present and those who were widowed, divorced, or separated. On the other hand, the labor force participation rate of white mothers with husbands present was significantly lower than that of white mothers who were widowed, divorced, or separated.

Children of Working Mothers

In March 1976, 28.2 million children under age 18 had working mothers (table 9). About 4.8 million (17 percent) of these children were of minority races. More than 1 out of 4 minority children (more than 1 out of 5 white children) was under 6 years of age.

Approximately 1.7 million minority children and 3.6 million white children had working mothers who were family heads. But the proportion of minority children whose working mothers were family heads was more than twice as high as that of white children--36 and 15 percent, respectively.

Table 9.--Number of Own Children of Working Mothers, by Race, Type of Family, and Age of Children, March 1976

(Numbers in thousands)

Type of family	Total children under 18 years	Children under 6 years	Children 6 to 17 years
Minority	4,792	1,247	3,545
Husband-wife family	3,079	848	2,231
Female-head family	1,712	399	1,313
White	23,367	5,192	18,175
Husband-wife family	19,789	4,532	15,257
Female-head family	3,579	660	2,918

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

Education

Most minority women workers are high school graduates. In March 1976, 65 percent had graduated from high school, including 12 percent who had completed 4 or more years of college. The comparable figures for white women were 76 and 14 percent, respectively.

The median 12.4 years of schooling for minority women workers in 1976 reflected an increase of more than 1 year from the median in 1966, bringing the median educational attainment to above the high school graduate level.

Both women and men of minority races are narrowing the education gap between themselves and their white counterparts. The following table shows the median years of schooling completed by minority and white women and men in 1976 and 1966:

	March 1976	March 1966
Women		
Minority	12.4	11.2
White	12.6	12.4
Men		
Minority	12.2	10.0
White	12.6	12.3

Note: Data are for persons 16 years of age and over in 1976 but 18 years and over in 1966. Data are from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Special Labor Force Reports Nos. 80 and 193.

Employment Status of High School Dropouts

High school dropouts are seriously disadvantaged in the labor market. In October 1976 there were 196,000 minority women workers 16 to 24 years of age who had left school before completing high school. Their unemployment rate was 44.9 percent (table 10). In contrast, among the nearly 949,000 white women of this age group who had dropped out of school, the unemployment rate was much lower--27.0 percent.

The jobless rate among minority women in this age group who had graduated from high school was somewhat lower--22.7 percent--but was still excessively high. The rate for white women graduates was 11.7 percent.

Table 10.--Employment Status of High School Graduates Never Enrolled in College and Dropouts, by Sex and Race, October 1976

(Persons 16 to 24 years of age)

Race	Graduates never enrolled in college		Dropouts	
	Labor force participation rate	Unemployment rate	Labor force participation rate	Unemployment rate
		Women		
Total	71.0	13.0	44.8	30.0
Minority	63.6	22.7	38.0	44.9
White	72.1	11.7	46.7	27.0
		Men		
Total	94.3	11.3	85.7	21.7
Minority	84.8	22.8	73.6	31.5
White	95.5	10.0	88.6	19.7

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data.

Earnings

Although the median wage or salary income of minority women increased by nearly 15 percent between 1973 and 1974, this advantage was seriously undercut by the 12-percent rate of inflation between those years. Median income of white women increased 7 percent during the same period.

The median wage or salary income of minority women, like that of white women, is substantially less than the income of men, either minority or white. In addition, fully employed minority women continue to earn less than white women, although the earnings gap has narrowed appreciably. In 1974 women of minority races who worked the year round at full-time jobs had a median wage or salary income of $6,611--94 percent of that of white women, 73 percent of that of minority men, and 54 percent of that of white men. In 1960 the corresponding proportions were 70, 63, and 42 percent.

Median Wage or Salary Income in 1974, by Race and Sex

Race	All workers		Year round full-time workers	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Total	$4,850	$10,404	$6,967	$12,072
Minority	4,751	7,617	6,611	9,082
White	4,863	10,745	7,025	12,343

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 101.

The low earnings of black 3/ women relative to those of white women may be partially attributed to the types of occupations in which they are employed. For example, the largest number of black women are employed in service occupations, except private household, where the median earnings of year round full-time women workers were $5,046 in 1974. The occupation employing the largest number of white women is clerical work, where year round full-time women workers had median earnings of $6,827. Significantly more black women than white were employed in private household work, where median earnings were only $2,676.

The earnings of married women make a substantial contribution to total family income. Nonfarm minority wives who worked in 1974 contributed a median of 32 percent to family income; for white wives, the median was 26 percent.

The median income of a black 3/ family headed by a woman was only $4,465 in 1974, less than half of the "low" standard of living budget for a family of four ($9,198) estimated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

3/ Data not available for minorities.

Conclusion

As the Nation continues its recovery from the 1973-75 recession, the unemployment rate for minority adult women is still excessively high--11.4 percent, seasonally adjusted, in the fourth quarter of 1976. The rate for white adult women was 7.1 percent. The minority teenage unemployment rate, after climbing to an all-time high of 39.3 percent in the second quarter of 1976, settled back to 35.8 percent by year's end. By contrast, the jobless rate for white teenagers was 17.0 percent.

In terms of employment during 1976, minority adult women experienced greater proportional increases than their white counterparts. By the fourth quarter of 1976, 4,140,000 minority adult women held jobs, 5.5 percent more than were working a year earlier; white adult women's employment stood at 27,950,000 by the end of 1976, a gain of 4.4 percent from the fourth quarter of 1975.

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